

Executive Summary: *A charter school is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract or charter with the state; the charter exempts the school from selected state or local rules and regulations. In return for funding and autonomy, the charter school must meet the accountability standards articulated in its charter. A school's charter is reviewed periodically (every 5 years) and can be revoked if the terms of the charter are not met. As of February 2010, charter schools operate in 40 states and the District of Columbia. In the following states, a charter school law has not been passed: Alabama, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.*

- Charter Schools are tuition-free public schools open all Montana students.
- Charter schools are funded by the State of Montana in much of the same manner that traditional public schools are funded.
- Charter schools have an authorizer, which is charged with evaluating and approving charter applications. Authorizers may be local school districts, universities and a new statewide authorizer. Authorizers will evaluate applications and grant a charter, monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational and student performance of the school.
- Authorizers will have to meet certain requirements to act as an authorizer.
- Charter schools have a five year "charter contract" with an authorizer that outlines the purposes of the school and the academic and non-academic outcomes for the students and school. The contract is a legally-binding document that also includes student academic outcomes.
- Charter schools are open to all who apply. If more students apply than the capacity of the program, class, grade level or number of total students cited in the charter, all students are accepted through a lottery.
- Charter schools are governed by a governing body composed of teachers, parents and community leaders. State law will give charter school governing bodies many rights normally given to local school boards, such as creating their own school budgets, hiring and firing school staff, setting salary schedules, setting school policies, upholding the school's mission and safeguarding the public trust.
- Charter schools receive automatic waivers from most state laws and regulations. This core autonomy allows them to tailor their school's academic program and make decisions that are in the best interests of the students they serve. These waivers will include freedom from teacher certification requirements.